Improved CaO/CaZrO$_3$ adsorbents with potential applications in sorption enhanced steam reforming

Ming Zhao$^1$, Matthew Bilton$^1$, Andy P. Brown$^1$, Adrian M. Cunliffe$^2$, Emiliana Dvininov$^3$, Valerie Dupont$^1$, Tim P. Comyn$^2$, Steven J. Milne$^1$

$^1$ Institute for Materials Research, SPEME, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
$^2$ Energy Research Institute, SPEME, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
$^3$ MEL Chemicals, Swinton, Manchester M27 8LS, UK

*corresponding author: simon.ming.zhao@gmail.com

Introduction

CaO is the natural choice for many applications such as CO$_2$ post-combustion capture for fossil fuel fired power plants or steam reforming for hydrogen production. In both these applications, CaO suffers from CO$_2$ capacity loss after multiple calcination cycles [1], hence a lot of effort is being put into finding different ways to improve its stability. This is translated into the retention of at least 0.3 g CO$_2$/g sorbent sorption capacity over multiple sorption/desorption cycles [2].

One way of inhibiting the CaO matrix densification is to add refractory “spacer” particles [3] which not only physically separate the particles, but also due to differential thermal expansion effects and differential sintering rates of the different components.

Materials and Methods

Calcium and zirconium hydroxides suspended in ethanol were prepared through the precipitation of the precursors with ammonium hydroxide. The two dispersions were mixed together, dried and then calcined at 800°C for 30 minutes in air. The CaZrO$_3$ content was controlled by varying the amount of zirconium component.

Thermogravimetric analysis was involved in assessing the CO$_2$ capacity and stability of the prepared sorbents. Additionally, other characterization tools such as XRD, SEM and TEM were used for materials characterization at different stages.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the CO$_2$ uptake and the carbonation of the as-prepared samples over up to 30 cycles [4].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>1st cycle uptake (g CO$_2$/g sorbent)</th>
<th>10th cycle uptake (g CO$_2$/g sorbent)</th>
<th>30th cycle uptake (g CO$_2$/g sorbent)</th>
<th>Carbonation (%) at 1 cycle</th>
<th>Carbonation (%) at 10 cycles</th>
<th>Carbonation (%) at 30 cycles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10CaZrO$_3$:90CaO</td>
<td>0.310</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.365</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15CaZrO$_3$:85CaO</td>
<td>0.251</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30CaZrO$_3$:70CaO</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.251</td>
<td>0.267</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for “self-reactivation” observed for all the samples reported here, with the most predominant being characteristic to sample 3, has been investigated as part of this work.

Figure 1. SEM images of porosity development within Sample 3, the 30CaZrO$_3$:70CaO sorbent after the ‘mild’ TGA cycles ending on calcination (carbonation: 15% CO$_2$, 650°C, 15min; calcination: air, 800°C, no dwell time). (a) Fresh form, (b) after 10 cycles, (c) after 30 cycles. The cuboid particles evident in b and c are identified as CaZrO$_3$ micro-particles by TEM.

At cycle 10 the powder matrix was more porous, containing <100 nm pores within a matrix of <200 nm CaO particles. This development of a more porous matrix in the first 10 carbonation-calcination cycles accounts for the observed rise in CO$_2$ capacity; progressive changes to this microstructure in the earlier cycles would give rise to the gradual increase in CO$_2$ uptake that is observed.

Significance

Under severe calcination, 950°C in 100% CO$_2$ (calcination 650°C in 100 % CO$_2$, 15 min), the most durable composition, 30%CaZrO$_3$:70%CaO demonstrated an uptake of 0.36 g CO$_2$/g-sorbent in cycle 1 decreasing to 0.31 by cycle 30, superior to many other spacer materials.

References